THOUGHTS on the SINGING of PSALMS AND ANTHEMS IN CHURCHES

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THE author of the following remarks thinks proper to begin them with the demand of there being conceded to him, that the exciting and the increasing of devout affections, is the only reason which can be given for the enlivening of the devotions of the Church with the charms of Poetry, and with those of Music.

Let the reader pause at this place, and frame in his own mind, either a denial or an acknowledgement of what has just now been affirmed to be the reason—the only reason of singing in religious assemblies. If he deny this, he had best lay down this essay, it being not designed for him. If he acknowledge the principle, there is asked of him no more than to admit whatever shall be fairly inferred from it.

Perhaps, however, the assuming of such premises may seem uncharitable ; and it may be supposed impossible, that any should plead for another object than that stated. But it is not impossible, and the caution cannot be uncharitable ; because there is occasionally heard the plea of mere gratification or amusement, and that by persons who would reject the imputation of designed indecorum ; and who would contend for the matter, as an expedient to bring people together for their edification. O deplorable insensibility to the sanctity of the place! as if the mixing of edification with amusement were either consistent with the professed design, under which it was set apart, or likely to be subservient to the duties to which it is appropri-

ated! If amusement, however innocent, were admissible, there might be mentioned many kinds of such amusement, which would tend more powerfully to the effect. They would also be less exceptionable than the singing of mock praises; for such are words of praise not intended to occupy the mind; and especially when accompanied by notes, calculated to efface any serious impression which may have been produced by a better exercise. We read in scripture, that St. Paul, after having given instructions relative to the due performance of divine service, represents as a probable consequence of practising what he had prescribed, that an unbeliever, on being present, would fall down and worship. Will the advocate for amusement anticipate such an effect, or think it at all probable? Or rather, is it not much more probable, and has it not happened, that while the unbeliever has been varying the motions of his limbs and of his fingers to the airs of the merry music, serious Christians have gone off from it with sorrow and disgust? It is not uncommon to meet with persons who have abandoned our communion, on the avowed principle, that they observed in it too little of seriousness and too much of levity. It is easy to answer such a mistaken reason of separation, so long as our service is what it ought to be. But the same is not easy when levity is encouraged and seriousness made to give way to amusement, in the very ordering of the service.

Let it not be objected, that the allowed end of sacred music is accomplished through the medium of the pleasing emotions which it excites. This must be acknowledged; but a distinction is to be taken between the making of devotion pleasing by the aid of music, and the applying of music to convey a pleasure not intended to be instrumental to devotion. It is this which is here reprobated as unseasonable, and indeed profane.

There was a necessity to combat this error; not only because it has been explicitly avowed, but because its influence has been perceivable in most of the abuses to be deplored: and it may be proper now to apply to these the principle which was set out with; dividing the subject into two branches, that of Anthems, and that of Psalms.

By Anthems, are meant passages of Holy Scripture, selected with a view to their being sung in an higher species of music than that of common psalmody: this being the meaning

of the word as handed down to us by the Church of England. If we extend it to other compositions, and admit them, it is in violation of the Rubrics of our Church; and as the practice is irregular, so the bad consequences of it are obvious. If any one Minister have a right to introduce into his Church, a poetical composition worthy of the occasion, yet not sanctioned by the Episcopal Church, every minister of a parish may do the same; and being equally left to his discretion, he may require his congregation to sing out of some insipid hymn book. In such a case, it would be inconsistent to censure him, unless indeed on account of some false doctrine introduced. But he may avoid this, and yet burthen the people with effusions which are little of a piece with the rational worship of our Church.

Next it should be observed of anthems, that they and the music to accompany them should be selected by skilful persons, and not left to the discretion of the performers. In the fine arts of Poetry, Painting, and Music, we meet with inamoratos, who become extravagantly fond each of his favourite art, without discovering any tolerable measure of taste or genius in that with which he is so much delighted. But to be at considerable pains to accomplish an extraordinary musical exhibition in our churches, and then to hear of persons of known taste, that they turn from it in disgust, is humiliating in the extreme. This, however, has sometimes happened in relation both to the words and music. In regard to the former, there have been known sentences strung together, not only without any connection of sense, but in contrariety to both sense and grammar.

Another maxim should be the requiring of the singers to be masters of their respective parts before they perform in the presence of the congregation: some acknowledged judge pledging his opinion that they are qualified. The proposal of making the church a singing school, during the time appropriated for worship, is too shameful to be ever brought forward in form; and yet the principle has been practised on very often, to the great dissatisfaction of congregations; and, it is to be hoped, with great self-reproach in the minds of Ministers for not having interfered with more authority in the way of prevention. Under this head it may be proper to insert the requiring of every performer to keep himself within proper bounds,

as to the elevation of his voice. Every one knows that the designed effect of the music can be produced no otherwise than by a judicious combination. But some vain young man—for what but vanity can be the cause—imagines that his voice is entitled to be heard above the voices of his companions. To any ear even tolerably correct, this would spoil the finest music ever heard. What then is to be the consequence? shall such a coxcomb be endured, or shall he be affronted? If the former, how inconsistent is it to demand credit for a performance, as an improvement of the service, although evidently a debasement of it! The latter part of the alternative is indeed disagreeable; but as experience shows that this is inseparably attached to the projected improvement, the latter should not be attempted without there being some persons who will undertake to prevent or to remedy the abuse.

Next to proper singing, there may be mentioned proper behaviour, in decorum suited to the place and the occasion. Among the young men admitted to our orchestras, there have been many instances of gross levity. Of this scandalous abuse there have been many mourning witnesses. We may be assured, that the endurance of it has a tendency to injure our Church, in a degree for which no singing can be a recompense. To accomplish a suitable carriage in the Church, among all the members of it in their respective pews, must be a difficult task, however worthy of being attempted. Although indecorum should be suppressed, it must rise to a certain height before interference can be justifiable. And even if palpable indecorum should be overlooked, the disgusted observer, if reasonable, will make allowance for a natural backwardness to the disagreeable office of rebuke in public, and will not take for granted, that either the Clergy or the lay gentlemen in authority are indifferent to the prostitution of the place, and the insult offered to the service. But for the winking at indecorum in a part of the Church under their immediate inspection, and entirely at their command, no such allowance is due; neither is there a probability of its being made. On the contrary, it is most likely that a disparaging opinion is formed of the religious characters of those who are indifferent, or supposed to be indifferent to so great an evil.

When it has happened, and, it is confessed with pleasure, to

have happened, though seldom, that the anthem, that the music, and that the performance has been what good sense, what good taste, and what good manners dictate, the exhibition must have afforded an high gratification to very many; and it is difficult to perceive on what ground any person can have reasonably taken offence, unless on that of the words being unknown to the congregation. This might be prevented, by authorising select anthems to be printed, and sold at the price of a few cents per copy. A sheet of paper would hold as many as any Church can have occasion for. Still, however, let it be remembered, that the selection should be confined to passages of Scripture; for any thing further would be contrary to the Rubrics.

Before the leaving of the present branch of the subject, it may be proper to mention, that the abuses stated under it are all of such a nature as more than disappoint any benefit or religious gratification to be expected; and that, accordingly, no excuses, grounded on the difficulty of guarding against the abuses, are to be admitted. Such excuses prove, if any thing, much more than is attended by them, even that the exercise in question should not be attempted.

The other branch of the subject is common PSALMODY.

There has been sometimes, although seldom, the opinion expressed, that all promiscuous singing had better be suppressed, on account of the discordance of the voices. From this opinion the author of the present essay dissents; and he will therefore express the sentiments which occur to him concerning the advantages and incident disadvantages.

In regard to the former, it will not be denied that the taking of the praises of God on the tongue has a tendency to interest the heart: and surely this is a sufficient reason for condescending to that simpler and easier music, which can be joined in by the generality of the people. And then, the effect which would be produced on almost any mind from the united voices of a collective body, not accompanied by manifest absurdity, although in musical strains not accommodated to a fastidious ear, must be confessed a most important use. It must be evident, that such an effect will be attendant on singing of this sort, so long as the law of sympathy shall be an operating principle of our constitution. Besides, promiscuous

singing existed for some ages in the Christian Church before the introduction of the other. And this is not a little in its favour: so that we should beware how we sacrifice a practice of the times when piety the most abounded, for the exclusive cultivation of another practice, which was not known until piety had undergone a visible decline.

As to the disadvantages of this general singing, there may be objected, that it does not advance that higher species of music which delights the practised ear. To this it is a sufficient answer, that divine worship is not instituted exclusively for those who are proficient in that art. But there is another disadvantage, which, it must be confessed, cannot so easily be removed, and perhaps must be submitted to, in a degree. It is that of the too loud singing of a few individuals, with discordant voices; the effect sometimes of vanity and sometimes of zeal. In relation to this it must be perceived, that where there is a general joining, the vehement or the ill-timed notes of an individual do not so easily become troublesome. But if an obstinate person should persevere in his disturbance of the congregation, he should be tenderly dealt with, but at all events made to submit. There is no danger of the diminution of a congregation from such a measure as this, properly conducted. On the contrary, there is much more danger of it from that mistaken delicacy, which would court or conciliate a member, by submitting to his humours, however unreasonable and inconvenient, which makes a membership contemptible by representing it as a favour done by the party. If we drive people from Church, by allowed indecorum in the performance, it is what we have to answer for at the bar of God. But if a man quit it, because we will not allow him to be a disturber, although we should admit him to be under a pious impulse, he is rendered, by such a trait of character, an unfit member of any social body, with whose comely order his prejudices may interfere.

Even if, contrary to the opinion here expressed, it be desirable that general singing should give way to the more cultivated; yet it may be taken for granted, that such a change may be despaired of, on account of the general dissatisfaction it would occasion: and this is so notorious, that no proposal of it has been made, although there is nothing in our Canons

or in our Rubrics, to interdict it. But if this part of our service is to be continued, the more we can improve it, the better. It must also be proper to induce the people to join in it, by any expedients which may make it the easier to them; and especially by an authoritative prevention of any indirect expedients to prevent them. For if the singing in question is to obtain, notwithstanding the objections on the score of taste, it ought surely to be cultivated, in defiance of the self-admiration of conceited individuals. Now, what is to be complained of under this head, is a systematic design in some places to the opposite end of difficulty and discouragement. What else can be the motive of constantly wishing to change the tunes, as soon as they have become familiarized to the people? Not only so, ingenuity is put to work for the accomplishment of this mischievous end. There is sometimes taken a good old tune, which has stood the test of critical skill for many ages: a slight alteration is made, always for the worse, and a new name is given to this tune; and the consequence is, as was, no doubt, anticipated, that the accustomed singer in his pew, recognizing the resemblance of his old friend, but not finding him the same, and being distracted between past custom and imaginary improvement, is hushed to silence.

The expedient to be here proposed for the counteracting of these abuses, is to mark in the margin of a Prayer Book the tune which shall be thought the best suited to each psalm. Then, when any psalm is directed by the Minister, it will be known what tune is to accompany it. And this union between psalm and tune is here proposed to be inseparable: because it harmonizes with the principle set out with: for so much are we under the government of the law of association, that where there has been often an union of words, of notes, and of feeling, the first two will scarce ever be heard, without the excitement of the last. This is a fact well known to those who influence the feelings of the people to political purposes, by the means of ballads. The matter is equally true of the connection between psalmody and the devotion which it ought to be our object to excite by it; and this affords an unanswerable argument against the submitting of sacred music to the direction of those who have no desire of making it the handmaid of devotion.

Not only should the tunes be established, but they should be few, for the purpose of rendering them familiar and easy to the people. The criterion for the number should be this: Estimate the number of portions which may be supposed sung on Sundays, and on the principal festivals throughout the year. Take such a divisor as that the quotient shall be a number confessedly not too often to hear a good tune in the course of of a year: the divisor is the number of tunes required. According to this standard, it would seem that no Church can want more than from a dozen to twenty tunes. But it may be said, Is all improvement in this line to be shut out? this is not the meaning; but it is that the introduction of a new tune should be very rare; and then, because it is better than some old one, which should give way to it.*

There are here conceived of but two sources of objection to the scheme. One is, the very improper motive of putting a stop, as much as may be, to the singing of the people. The other is, the variety in which persons delight to indulge themselves in the exercise of a natural talent, from which they derive pleasure, and perhaps edification. But such persons ought to make a distinction between private gratification and public utility. If the latter is the most likely to be accomplished; that is, if the people are the most likely to be induced to sing by a very limited though sufficient variety, this object ought to govern in the Church, and a more extended variety should be reserved for private houses and for select companies. They who have studied psalmody, and are much in the practice of it in private, in consequence of a peculiar aptitude for the employment, do not always consider that this cannot be expected of the members of a congregation generally, who may yet join in what has been made easy to them by habit, while they will think themselves excused, from the exercise if it be made difficult to them. The supposition is still gone on, that it is desirable to allow their aid; for, if so, the suitable means of it should be adopted.

* The author is strengthened in his opinion by inspection of a small book in his possession, containing selections of psalms and tunes, purporting to be those sung in the parish church of St. James, Westminster. In that church there is morning and evening service daily throughout the year, and yet the number of tunes is twenty.

If what has been already recommended should be steadily pursued, another evil, of which there has been complaint, would cease of course. There is here alluded to an unsuitable junction of psalm and tune. It is evident, that a tune proper for strains of praise may ill suit those which are either plaintive or merely instructive. And what is proper for either of these may be improper for the other. This is an additional argument for not leaving musical arrangement to the discretion of every performer. But, as was said, in case of arrangement on the other points, there would be no need of any here.

Something must be said concerning interludes and voluntaries. Certainly nothing contrary either to good taste or to decency should be tolerated, for the gratification of private whim, much less in violation of all regard to religion and to decorum. If the contrary to this were understood, when people are put to the expense of furnishing a church with an organ, it is probable that there would be found few willing to contribute. Indeed, it seems impossible to account for the prejudices which some entertain against organs, otherwise than from an association formed in their minds of the instruments, with the recollection of the nuisances which they are made to serious people, by being played on improperly. In regard to interludes, a number, adjusted to the different styles of music, should be selected by some proficient. There should be noted, for the government of the performer, the different psalms to which they are respectively intended to be attached; and there should be required of him strict regard to the limits thus marked out. The late Mr. F. Hopkinson, a gentleman of known taste, in an essay published in his works, has supposed, that what is here treated of is left to the discretion of the performer; and he has stated, with great judgment, the rules which will govern such a person, if a master in the line of his profession. But suppose that no such consummate master can be obtained; or that, if obtained, he is a master in another sense than the one here intended; that is, he is an instructor, and wishes to increase the number of his pupils, by exhibiting the varieties of his talent and the force of his execution. Is it not evident, that while he is at the organ, his object, and that of those who seated him there, are not only different, but in opposition? If he sacrifice theirs to his, would such a liberty be permit-

ted in any other line? And when permitted in this, are there not strong appearances of its being the result of a want of sufficient interest felt by those who should control him?

As to voluntaries, the licentiousness of them is conspicuous in some places in those light airs which are calculated to send people dancing out of church. To the mind of him who now writes, it seems impossible that any man who, during the service, had been engaged in the duties of it, should, as soon as it is over, indulge himself in this light fancy. There is a well known remark of Mr. Addison, in which he compares a light voluntary after the service and the sermon, to a farce acted after a tragedy. In the latter case there being the professed design, and, in the former, strong appearances of the design of effacing any impression which may have been made by what went before. Independently on the high authority of Mr. Addison for taste and judgement, it may be affirmed, that the man who, having heard his remark, can conduct himself without any regard to the proper effect of it, has an important change of mind to undergo, before he can be fit to be entrusted with the government of any department in which the dignity and decorum of religious worship are concerned.

On this part of the subject there ought not to be omitted a few words on the preposterous practice of playing between the lines of a verse. From the essay of Mr. Hopkinson already alluded to, it appears, that he could not endure this palpable contradiction of common sense. And if a performer should be so dull as not to comprehend, or have so little judgment as not to perceive the force of the reasons there opposed to it, he should be required to submit to the better information of those whose reputation in the musical line is established, and their taste undoubted.

If any should imagine that there is an hardship in subjecting a performer to the rules here advocated, let them give a reason, why there should be indulged to the station in question greater license than to the divinely instituted station of a clergyman? Shall the latter be confined to prescribed prayers, and shall the former have the privilege of obtruding what has the effect of counteracting every use for which prayer was instituted? But perhaps it may be thought that we cannot retain or procure performers on the terms proposed. The writer of this

has no such fear; if it be entertained by others, he makes up his mind to the doing without them. But he is convinced that the danger is ideal.

On taking a retrospect of what has been written, in reference to both the branches of the subject, there seems ground to recommend earnestly, that in all the appointments to offices attached to the musical department, & in all framing of choirs to aid it, regard should be had to the religious and the moral characters of those who offer. Due attention to this would of itself prevent many of the abuses complained of. Immorality in either of these descriptions of persons, has the effect of lessening the respectability of the Church in the estimation of the observers. And as to religion, although it is far from the wish of him who writes, to force questions on any in regard to the emotions of their hearts, yet he never could perceive with what consistency any who have not the appearance of a profession of it, can be permitted to meddle in our concerns. It is true, that a man neither moral nor religious, but entertaining due respect for the feelings of the congregation, would avoid insulting those feelings, by indulging himself in any indecorum in their presence. But it would be rather ludicrous to make an ecclesiastical provision, having for its object those sensibilities, the want of which is a drawback from the character of the gentleman. And, therefore, the proper rule is the requiring of a religious profession, with a suitable practice.

If there should seem excess in the measure of the censures of some of the abuses stated, it should be recollected that they are the result of the point of view in which the matter is contemplated: And this is, that as our blessed Saviour, when he purged the temple of the money-changers, gave as the reason of his conduct—"Make not my Father's house an house of merchandize;" so, there is at least as much reason to say—make it not a place of amusement; or of any thing which has a tendency to drive from the mind all devotion and all seriousness. In regard to the most material of the abuses complained of, the writer has been in the habit of considering the perpetrators of them as not having the fear of God before their eyes. Are there not then accessible to such persons convivial parties? are there not concerts? are there not theatres, in

which they may gratify their taste for musical amusement, without intruding on our devotions, to the disturbance of those who join in them? Let such questions occur to them or not, our conduct should hold out the language to them, in reference to the service of our Church—"You have no part or lot in this matter."

There is not known to many, to what lengths liberties with us would be carried if permitted. One man publishes a book of music, and desires of a Minister, that his tunes may be forthwith introduced, for the readier sale of his edition. Another entertains a kindness for a certain composer; and in order that the fruits of his labour may be the better known through the medium of the service of a Church, an appeal is made to the supposed good nature of its Rector. And a third knows of some female, who teaches the elegant accomplishments of music; and he thinks it will give her an eclat, if she can be exhibited in an orchestra. Oh! how easy is it to bestow favours of this sort, under the cover of the principle, that mere amusement is to be an object of musical performance in our Churches! But the principle is here rejected, and the opinion is avowed, that one necessary expedient for the disengaging of ourselves from the inconveniences to which it has subjected us, is, not to suffer the interference of those who hold it, in any measures adopted for the improvement of our music.

A distinction should be observed between this and the making use of professional talent in a safe way; and the distinction may be illustrated thus: If our Church at large were editing a book of Common Prayer, and if the Printer who could fabricate the most complete edition of it, were a man who felt no interest in its contents, we should approve of the employing of him, although we should never have thought of consulting him in the framing of the book. On the same principle, if a musical professor, indifferent to religion, have composed what we judge suitable to our worship, let us avail ourselves of his abilities; but let us not submit to him the question, what species of music is to our purpose.

This brings to mind another matter worthy of being noticed. It is well known that some members of congregations

have been occasionally offended, by seeing persons exhibited in their orchestras, as singers, who never appear in any Church at any other time; and whose occupation, to say the least, is unfavourable to piety and morals. The offence has been considered by some others as the effect of weakness. In regard to persons so opposed in sentiment, it might, perhaps, be made a problem, whether the difference be the result of greater weakness on one side, or of less seriousness on the other. But supposing the matter decided clearly against the former, still it might be hoped that the strong would bear with the weak, in consideration of the principle before referred to in this essay, that of the law of association, the force of which is so much recognized by philosophical observers of human nature. We appeal to this law, in support of many of the institutions of our Church. In regard to kneeling in prayer, there are those who think it worth their while to assure us gravely, that the divine Being looks to the disposition of the heart. So, when we consecrate Churches, and set them apart from secular occasions, arguments are ostentatiously brought to demonstrate that there can be no sanctity in bricks and timbers. We cannot defend ourselves concerning such matters, but by reasons resolvable into the said law of association. Apply all this to the subject in hand, and it will at least go to the extent of interdicting what has been stated as an occasion of offence.

But it is time to hasten to a conclusion; and there shall only be solicited, in regard to all which has been written, that the propriety of it may be judged of by the reasonable maxim in an apocryphal book of scripture—"Whatsoever thou takest in hand, remember the end, and thou shalt never do amiss."

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